

Prepared Statement before the House Committee on Homeland Security's Subcommittee on
Border, Maritime and Global Counter Terrorism and the House Committee on Foreign Affairs'
Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere

May 27, 2010

Ambassador John D. Negroponte, Former Deputy Secretary of State and Ambassador to
Mexico.

Chairman Thompson, Chairman Engel:

It is a pleasure to appear before you today to address the issue of the next steps for the Merida Initiative.

By way of background, let me say that the issues of governance and security as affected by criminal behavior has been a theme encountered at numerous different times during my government career. To cite but three examples, when I served as Political Counselor at the United States Embassy in Quito, Ecuador from 1973 to 1975 I also served concurrently as the Embassy's Narcotics Coordinator. At that time there was already serious concern about the flow of cocaine from Bolivia and Peru through countries such as Ecuador and Colombia. Second, from 1989 to 1993 I served as Ambassador to Mexico where the fight against drug trafficking had become a major issue in the US-Mexico relationship. And third, as Deputy Secretary of State in the last administration from 2007 to 2009, working with Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Ambassador Thomas Shannon, I oversaw the development and presentation of our Merida plan to the United States Congress.

Given this trajectory of working on narcotics related issues off and on for more than 35 years, one might ask what is different and what has changed and does this experience give us any guidance as we look to the future. I suppose my first point, though obvious is still worth making; problems with narcotrafficking remain with us to this day notwithstanding the enormous blood and treasure that has been expended up and down the length of the hemisphere to deal with these issues. So, we all must agree that this is a long term issue to which there are no quick fixes. We need strategic patience.

But there have been significant shifts and developments over those decades; advances and retreats; improvements and setbacks. And while this is a long term problem requiring strategic patience, this is not to say that nothing can be done, that any effort is doomed to failure, that there is no plan or course of action that can propel us towards a better state of affairs in the short and medium term. Quite the contrary, we have seen instances where concerted national action integrated with effective international support can bring about very encouraging results. A little more than a decade ago, Colombia was in dire straits with rampant criminal violence, loss of vast territorial extensions to insurgent and criminal control and little hope for the future. Today, through the heroic efforts of the Colombian people, government and armed forces there has been a dramatic turnaround in the situation. Government has restored control to previously denied areas. Institutions of democratic governance have been revitalized and Colombia's economy is on the march as an investment and tourist destination, as I was personally able to witness when I represented the United States at the Annual OAS General Assembly in Medellin in June of 2008. In prior years, Medellin had been off limits to international visits of this kind because it was so engulfed by criminality.

I mentioned my service in Mexico from 1989 to 1993. During those years, Mexico was a transit country and the cartels were principally Colombian. There was no "Juarez Cartel" or "Tijuana Cartel." Nor was there significant domestic drug consumption. Though there was collaboration between U.S. and Mexican authorities, it was fitful, reluctant and on occasion interrupted because of one controversy or another. Most notably and notoriously the snatching of Humberto Alvarez Machain, a Mexican doctor, from his office in April 1990 by bounty hunters, who thereafter delivered him to DEA agents in the United States where he was held and eventually tried in connection with the murder of DEA Agent Camarena in Guadalajara, Mexico,

in 1985. Notwithstanding the fact that Alvarez Machain was eventually acquitted for lack of sufficient evidence, his case cast a shadow of uncertainty over US/Mexico counter narcotics cooperation for at least three years.

Moving quickly to the situation which prevails today, the atmosphere of collaboration between our two countries is at an unprecedented level. Gone is the hesitation of earlier years. Very shortly after taking office President Calderon of Mexico proactively sought full-fledged United States assistance in dealing with the problems associated with narcotrafficking. The Merida Initiative, whose history is well known to the Committees, is the result. It will soon come up for renewal. There is no doubt whatsoever in my mind that this initiative deserves continued and even increased US government support for a number of reasons.

First, there is strong and unequivocal commitment on the part of the Mexican government to deal effectively with these issues. They have spent thousands of lives and billions of pesos to squarely confront the threat. They have adopted a “Whole of Government” approach and seem prepared to make the kinds of police and judicial reforms, among others, that augur well for durable solutions.

Second, the level of interest in collaborating with the United States is unprecedented. That the government of Mexico, under the leadership of President Calderon should reach out to the United States in the way it has invites us, indeed obliges us, to make a positive reciprocal response.

Third and last, our own national security interests are directly affected. We share a common 2000 mile border. Can we reasonably expect that the cities and towns along our side of the border will remain immune to the effects of criminal violence on the other side of the Rio

Grande? What about the longer term economic impacts if effective security is not encouraged and reinforced now – impacts on trade, investment and overall prosperity of our border region? Hundreds of thousands of jobs are at stake, not to mention the quality of life and aspirations of millions of residents on both sides of our common border.

By extending the Merida Initiative beyond its initial three year period we would be bringing vital encouragement and support to a friendly government determined to address the serious challenges it faces. With our continued and consistent assistance, I am sure they can succeed.

May 23, 2010